

Don't leave home without it

A guide to using NASA reports and building a publication library

By Bill O'Brien

It's 6:35 p.m. on a Wednesday night. I am at home with my hands resting on a computer keyboard. Well, it's 15 minutes later and there is no question about it; on this day, not one idea, not one single creative thought can be squeezed out of my concrete reinforced frontal lobe and transferred on to the screen. I heard about this happening to writers before — "writers block" they call it.

You feel as though you have the IQ of a breath mint. I hate this feeling because it is an unpleasant reminder of the first time I asked a girl out for a date. I couldn't remember anything that day either, just babbled a lot, and ran a sweat. So here I sit in front of the computer, alone in bad company.

OK, I came up with something for you. It is amazing what applied desperation and a quick prayer can do for motivation. Despite cursor constipation, I figure I can still tell you how to get the equivalent of a "get out of jail free card" from the government. Then I'll suggest resources for building a publication library on various aviation subjects from the FAA or other government agencies.

Get out of jail free card

There is a rule hiding in Part 91 that every pilot in the world knows about and only a handful of mechanics even know exists. This rule is what I call the government version of the popular board game's "get out of jail free card."

The rule is section 91.25 titled: Aviation Safety Reporting Program: Prohibition against use of reports for enforcement purposes. Paraphrasing the rule, it says the FAA will not use any NASA reports filed under the Aviation Safety Reporting Program or any information derived therefrom in any enforcement action except information concerning accidents or criminal offense.

OK, legal rhetoric notwithstanding, what do we have here? We have immunity from FAA penalty action if, within 10 days after you find that you screwed up, you send in a NASA Form ARC 277D to the Aviation Safety Reporting System, P.O. Box 189, Moffett Field, CA 94035-9800.

Using the worst case scenario, here's how it works. You are an IA. You just finished an extensive annual on the FAA administrator's personal plane, a 1938 model, Beech 18. After the administrator takes off for the FAA Academy in Oklahoma City, OK, you remember that you did not sign off in the logbooks a recurrent AD on the magneto switches. Oh yes, I forgot to tell you the aircraft was going to be used to train brand new FAA inspectors on how to inspect aircraft maintenance records. You figure that you are now in deep kimchee. What to do. First you send an AD sign off that meets FAR 43.9 to the administrator posthaste. Then you fill out a NASA form ARC 277D (it's made for mechanics), xerox it for your records, and drop it in the mailbox within 10 days.

Yes, for you cynics out there, the form does have a tear-off portion which you will have to fill out your name, address, and telephone number. I'll explain the reason they need that in a minute.

Now what happens

NASA, the space shuttle folks, processes the ARC 277D form. Each form is screened for information concerning criminal offenses. Now remember what FAR 91.25 said, if the NASA form reports criminal activity, the report is given to the Department of Justice and the FAA. No immunity! If the report concerns an accident, the form is given to the NTSB. No immunity! After recording the data, NASA removes the tear off identification strip of the form, date stamps it, and promptly returns it to you as a receipt. This strip is your proof that you filed a NASA report within the required 10 day grace period. The tear off identification strip also allows NASA to get

any additional information like — where was the Beech 18 now? Or does the owner know the AD was not signed off properly?

In addition to giving you the form's identification strip, NASA, within 72 hours, will de-identify all information in its computer that might assist in or establish the identity of a person(s) filing NASA ASRS report. The NASA folks are proud of the fact that there has been no breach of confidentiality in more than 20 years of the ASRS under NASA management.

Continuing on with our worst case scenario. In about four weeks from mailing in the NASA form you find that your mailbox is stuffed with a FAA letter of investigations signed by the entire class of 25 brand new FAA inspectors who checked the records of the Beech 18 and found you wanting. Smiling confidently you whip out your NASA identification strip and your xerox copy of the NASA form. Now what?

Believe it or not, the FAA considers the filing of a report with NASA concerning an incident or occurrence that may involve a violation of the FAR as an indication of a constructive attitude and such an attitude will tend to prevent future violation. Therefore, although a finding of a violation of the FAR may be made by the 25 FAA inspectors and it may appear on your record if you found guilty, neither a civil penalty nor certificate suspension will be imposed upon your head if:

1. The violation was inadvertent and not deliberate.
2. The violation was not a criminal offense or accident related.
3. The person submitting the report has not been found guilty in any prior FAA enforcement action for a period of five years prior to the date on the NASA form.
4. The person proves that he or she has submitted the form within the 10-day grace period.

Keep in mind that if the FAA finds out from sources other than the NASA report, the enforcement action will be processed using normal procedures.

Why is the FAA and NASA offering these “get out of jail free cards?” They believe that by offering limited immunity to pilots, mechanics, cabin crew, and air traffic controllers, they can encourage the aviation community to identify and report deficiencies and discrepancies that otherwise would not be reported. This system has worked very well for pilots for the last 20 years. We mechanics are a little late getting on board, but now you got the word.

For you nonbelievers and card carrying cynics, additional information on this NASA Aviation Safety Reporting System can be found in Advisory Circular 00-46D, dated Feb. 26, 1997. NASA ARC 277D forms are available free of charge from your local Flight Standards District Office, Flight Service Station, or from NASA ASRA at the address I listed earlier. Remember, you must use the proper form for mechanics. The NSN Form number for the NASA ARC277D form for mechanics is NSN 0052-00-920-2000. Last but not least for you web crawlers, information on the Aviation Safety Reporting System can be found at: <http://olias.arc.nasa.gov/asrs>.

Information resources

Many professional mechanics and first class repair stations build a FAA publication reference library on maintenance subject areas. In a short time you can get your weight in free material and data for the cost of a 32-cent stamp. Also, in the following list of items is a list of publications for sale by the U.S. Government Printing Office, Superintendent of Documents. (see item No. 5):

1. Accident information — If you want an accident report, contact:

National Transportation Safety Board, Public Inquiry Section, RE-51, 490 L'Enfant Plaza East S.W., Washington, D.C. 20594, (202) 382-6735

Be sure you have the “N” number, pilot's name, or location of the nearest town with an airport. This information will help the specialist who will process your request.

A warning should be given here. The information in these reports is sometimes graphic and unpleasant to the reader, so use good judgment and common sense around the friends and family of the accident victim(s).

2. If you lose your mechanic certificate or if you want to report a change of address on your mechanic or pilot certificate, contact:

Flight Standards Service, Airman Certification Branch, AFS-760, FAA, P.O. Box 25082, Oklahoma City, OK 73125, (405) 954-3205

Remember that Part 65, Sec. 65.16 requires a \$2 fee to replace a certificate, but if you just update your address, there is no cost because the FAA does not issue you a new card. If you are a current IA or a pilot that gets a medical every two years, don't worry if you move because the new address on your IA application or medical is transferred to your mechanic's file.

3. To get information or copies of TSO, contact:

FAA Headquarters, Aircraft Certification Office, AIR-120, 800 Independence Ave, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20591, (202) 267-9578

4. To get a copy of an FAA specification or a standard, contact:

FAA Headquarters, Certification Procedures Branch, AIR 110, 800 Independence Ave, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20591, (202) 267-9588

5. To get copies of FAA regulations, contact:

Superintendent of Documents, P.O. Box 371954, Pittsburgh, PA 15250-7954, (202) 512-1800
Please call first and get the correct price for the FAR you want before you send in your request.

6. To order "free" advisory circulars, you need the advisory circular checklist (and status of other FAA publications) because you must order the AC by its correct name and number. To get the checklist sent to your home, fax:

Dept. of Transportation

(301)-386 5394

Once you have the checklist, order blanks are in the back of the check list. If you already know the ACs that you need, write:

U.S. Department of Transportation, Subsequent Distribution Office, SVC-121.23, Ardmore East Business Center, 3341 Q 75th Ave., Landover, MD 20785

If you have questions on any DOT/FAA publications, you can contact:

DOT Publications Helpline

(301) 322 4961

7. If you need a copy of an aircraft record file, registration, owners, 337, etc. because the owner lost the paperwork, contact:

Flight Standards Service, Aircraft Registration Branch, AFS-760, P.O. Box 25082, Oklahoma City, OK 73125, (405) 954-3131

You will have to pay a small fee which depends on the number of documents they xerox or microfiche prints they send you, so give a call prior to placing your written request. The best thing about this service is the registry folks are pretty good at getting the information to you in a very short period of time.

8. To get a copy of an FAA order, handbook, or notice, call:

(202) 267-3484

9. If you want to get a copy of the latest FAA or DOT directory, contact the Superintendent of Documents (see item No. 5 for the address and phone number).

10. Here are two toll free HOT LINE numbers:

Consumer Hotline

(800) FAA-SURE

This hotline is provided for citizens with complaints concerning matters such as: carry-on luggage, airport security procedures, child safety seats, FAA examinations, aircraft certification, or facility operation.

Safety Hotline

(800) 255-1111

This hotline is intended primarily for those in the aviation industry that have specific knowledge of an alleged violation of the Federal Aviation Regulations that affects safety of flight such as: unapproved parts, improper repairs or alterations, unqualified individuals performing maintenance, etc. The identities of the callers are held in strict confidence and protected from disclosures under the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act.

11. For you closet computer wizards, here are some government internet addresses where you can access my world:

www.faa.gov

This will get you the FAA web site. All sorts of regulations, advisory circulars, new ADs, safety data, and hot links to other web sites are available.

www.fedworld.gov

This site is run by the National Technical Information Service where, in theory, everything written by the government short of the latest UFO reports and who is responsible for crop circles is available to the public. Internet addicts tell me that this site is slow because of the demand. But if you have the time, the information is available.

www.nts.gov

This site will provide you with the latest aviation safety recommendations and accident reports which list probable cause.